Neighbors protest Vons closing
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As funerals go, the ceremony will be more bittersweet for Dottie Marshall than grief-inspiring.

"I've walked to this store every day for years," said the 66-year-old City Heights resident, who was toting two full grocery bags yesterday in front of the Vons supermarket on Landis Street. "Now, I'll have to take the bus for miles to get my food."

Community activists and longtime customers will gather at 8:30 this morning in the store's parking lot to perform a mock burial and to mourn the passing of one of only two supermarkets in the working-class neighborhood.

Vons officials announced last November that the City Heights site would be among 11 it was closing in its chain today as part of a company-wide restructuring.

"Unfortunately, the store was unprofitable," said Vons spokeswoman Mary McAboy, noting that the Arcadia-based company recently took a $57 million charge against profits and laid off 250 workers. "This has been a very difficult decision, because we are in the business of opening stores, not closing them."

McAboy said Vons will attempt to lease the building -- which it owns -- to another company, though not necessarily a supermarket industry competitor.

That comes as small consolation to nearby residents, who will now be forced to shop out of the area or go a few blocks north to Lucky to get their eggs, soda and broccoli.

"If Vons is no longer going to have a presence here, it should offer a free, unrestricted lease to someone who wants to go in" with a supermarket, said Anna Daniels, president of the City Heights Community Development Corp.

Daniels said the low-income area of 60,000 residents has been decimated by corporate flight, with two major convenience stores and a bank having closed their doors in the last year.

She blamed the demise of the Vons store on the company's advertising policies, which she said ignore ethnic minorities.

"We have a mix of Latinos, Asian-Americans and African-Americans in this community who eat and get their cars fixed," Daniels said. "Vons simply didn't target these people in their marketing."
For Clara Steen, 57, the shutdown will mean sore feet.

"Ain't this some news?" she said, after reading a sign on the Vons window thanking customers for their loyal patronage. "I'll have to walk farther to get my dinner. And this was the only place around here that took double coupons."

Caption: 1 PIC
Sign of the times: Closing of Vons store leaves only one supermarket in City Heights.

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